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Wurra-Wurra

A Legend of Saint Patrick at Tara

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Irene Owen-Andrews
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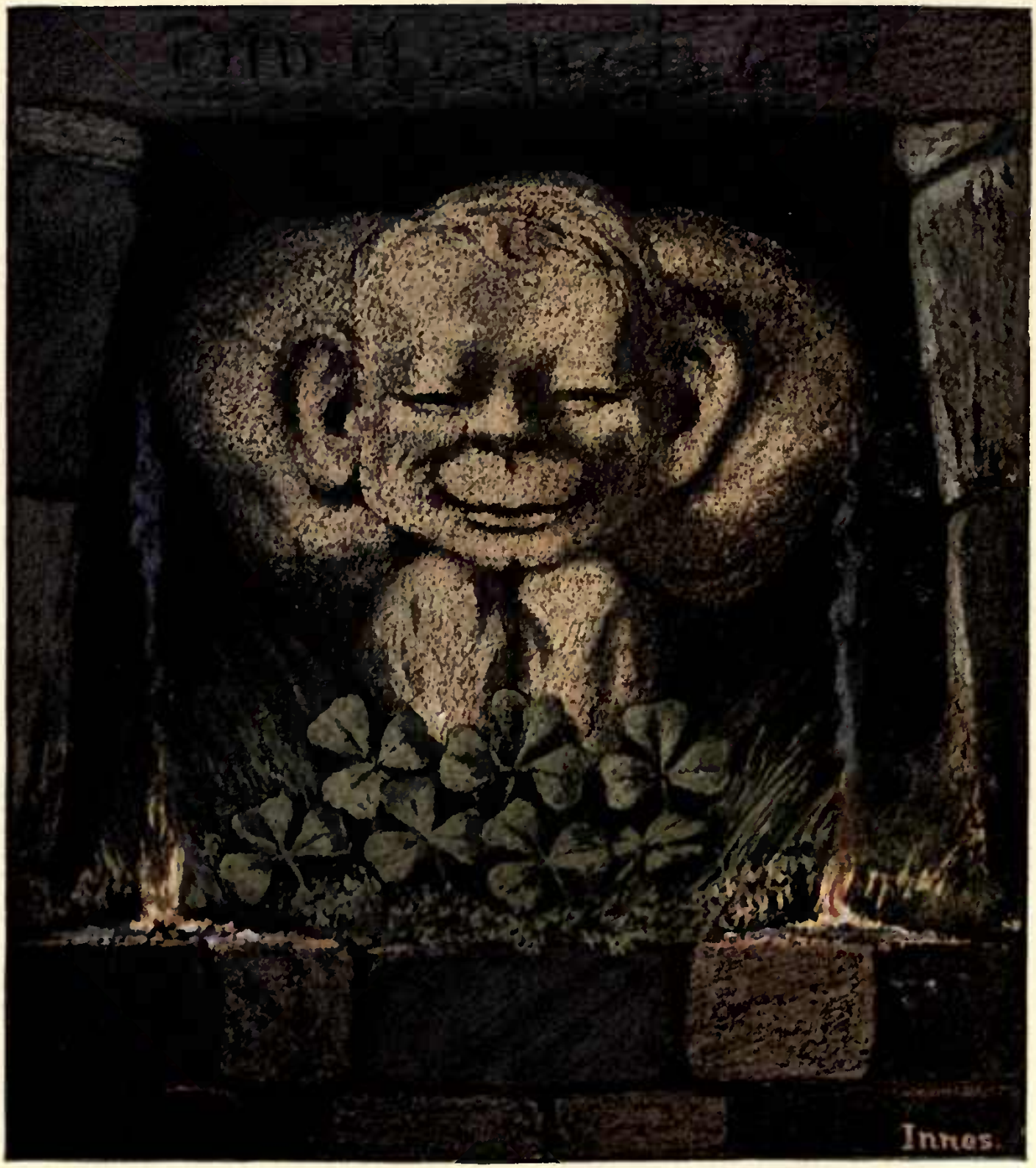
WURRA-WURRA



GROTTO AND IMAGE OF WURRA-WURRA

Drawn by John Innes, from his reconstruction of this very ancient Celtic Idol, as described in the Legend.

WURRA-WURRA

A LEGEND OF SAINT PATRICK AT TARA

HERE FIRST TRANSCRIBED AND COMPARED WITH THE TESTIMONY OF ANCIENT RECORDS AND MODERN HISTORICAL RESEARCH

By CURTIS DUNHAM

AUTHOR OF "THE GOLDEN GOBLIN," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS, INCLUDING A RECONSTRUCTION OF THE VERY ANCIENT CELTIC IDOL CALLED WURRA-WURRA

By JOHN INNES

NEW YORK

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TO THOSE DESCENDANTS
OF THE O'SHAUGHNESSY WHO PRE-
SERVED THIS LEGEND OF ST. PATRICK AT TARA;
TO THE MEMORY OF FATHER O'SHAUGHNESSY,
FROM WHOM IT WAS RECEIVED ORALLY; AND
TO THE ANTI-WORRY SOCIETIES OF
CHRISTENDOM, THIS TRANSCRIPT
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

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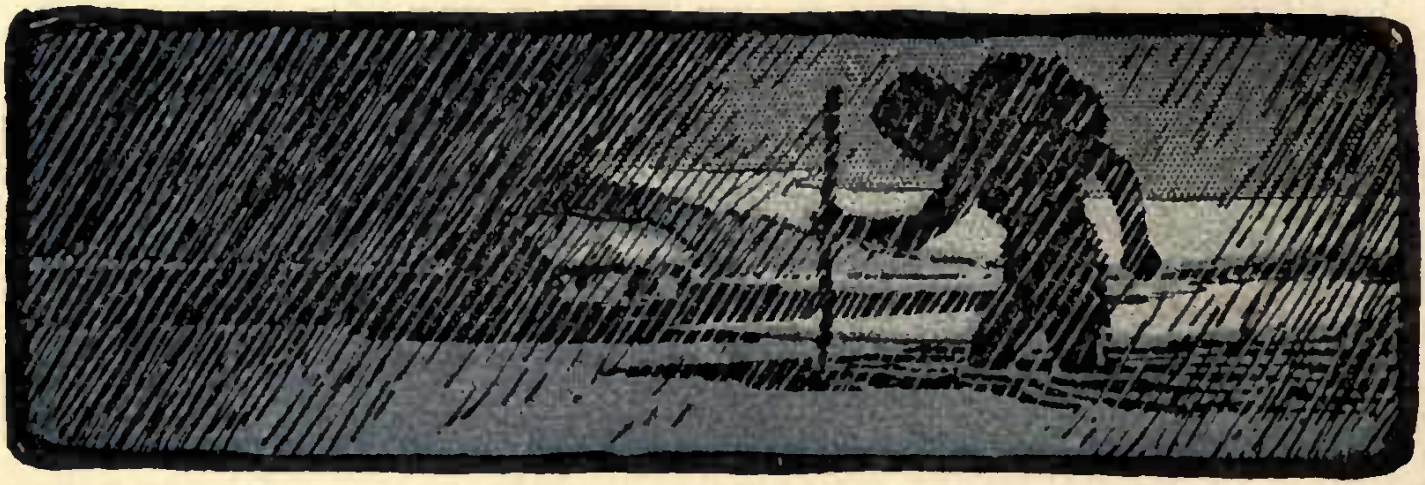
I.

'TWAS in the days whin the good Patrick of Armagh slept with wan eye open, owin' to the murderous desire of a bunch of haythin magicians to hang onto their jobs at the court of King Laeghaire. There was the chief royal wizard, Lochru by name, an' two other divil-sint Druid priests, namely Caplait an' Lucat-Moel, who hild the

graft of makin' wise haythins of Ethne the Fair an' Fedelm the Ruddy, the King's two daughters an' the twin apples of his eye; an' between the three of thim, with the King lookin' their way wan day an' Patrick's way the next, the spells of wind an' water an' black magic the good Patrick had to circumvint were sure a caution.

Now Patrick, bein' a gintleman and the guest of King Laeghaire at Tara, could not



turn himself loose on mimbers of the King's own household. All the same, if he was to clane up Ireland, Druids, snakes an' all, 'twas important to begin by convertin' the King. So he was goin' easy like, wan day miltin' Laeghaire to tears with his iloquence, an' alas! the nixt day findin' the King bowin' down to the great gold an' silver idol, Cromm Cruach, which stood on the plain near Tara surrounded by twilve smaller idols of brass an' tin. 'Twas

a case of Cromm Cruach against Patrick an' the Four Gospils with the odds even.

Wan thing was plain, Cromm Cruach the big idol, an' all the little idols must go. So wan day, in the prisence of King Laeghaire an' all his household an' a great multitude of the people, Patrick raised his staff before Cromm Cruach, an' in the twinklin' of an eye the big idol an' all the little idols sank into the plain up to their necks. 'Twas a miracle the like of which had niver been seen in Ireland. An' King Laeghaire, seein' that all the spells of his Druid magicians could not raise up Cromm Cruach again, nor even the smallest of the little idols, became a Christian on the spot.

Observin' the same, old Lochru the wizard fell to ragin' an' tearin' out his long whiskers

Patrick casting down Cromm Cruach and the twelve smaller idols

by handfuls. Caplait an' Lucat-Moel were frothin' at the mouth because of their fat jobs gone a-glimmerin'. 'Twas a great day for the good Patrick, barrin' the prisint failure of the multitude to follow the example of the King.

Instead of fallin' on their knees to receive the blissin' of Patrick as he stood there with Sechnall his bishop, Erc his judge, an' Presbiter Bescna his chaplain, all in their church vestmints, the people turned their faces to the West as wan man, beat upon their brists an' cried out: "O, Wurra-Wurra!" In their mixture of ancient Irish an' Gaelic (which was the common speech in those days), three times they cried: "O, Wurra-Wurra!" before they would let Patrick bliss an' disperse thim.

Now there was in Patrick's train Keth Mac Maragh, his strong man, the same that carried him on his back through the bogs an' was his champion whin it came to fightin' barbarians who would not accept the Gospil with whole heads. Keth was moreover a bit of a shanachy, or story-teller, in his way, with a head full of the old tales an' histories set down in the Book of the Dun Cow, which made him the frind of ivery small boy wheriver Patrick carried on the good

work. So whin he heard the multitude cry out: "O, Wurra-Wurra!" at the downfall of Cromm Cruach, Keth was disturbed in his mind. Niver before had he heard those words of lamentation uttered by a multitude all in spontaneous accord. Yet in the mouths of sorrowin' girls forsaken by their lovers, an' old women at a wake or grievin' over sheep with the foot-rot, they were words as familiar in Patrick's time as they are to this day.

But the thing that most disturbed the mind of Keth Mac Maragh was the sight of Finola of the White Shoulder, wan of Patrick's three embroideresses—which means a Christian mimber of Patrick's own household—turnin' her pretty face to the West with the multitude an' joinin' in the cry of "Wurra-Wurra!" 'Twas sure a haythin act, an' as Keth had been for a long time swate on this

same Finola, findin' her white shoulder a plisant place to rist his head on, he wint speedily an' taxed her with it.

But Finola only hung her pretty head an' was silent.

"Finola," says Keth, "ye ought to be ashamed of yoursilf, you a mimber of the good Patrick's household an' a 'broiderer of the sacred vestmints."

Niver a word answered Finola, but only hung her head the lower.

Then said Keth Mac Maragh with a keen look at the girl:

"Finola, 'tis yoursilf has told the truth though not a word has passed your lips. Cromm Cruach, which

our good Patrick has overthrown, was not the only great false god in Ireland."

Now the girl appeared startled, but her head still drooped an' she answered neither yes nor no. With a smile half hid by the hair on his lip, Keth spoke sternly to her:

"Finola, I have it from your own lips that you came to Patrick at Tara from your people over in the West country. 'Tis over in the West stands another great idol, an' the name of it is Wurra-Wurra."

At these words Finola began trimbling violently, though she spoke no word, an' her head still drooped. Keth Mac Maragh showed the girl no mercy.

"'Tis in my mind, Finola," he said, "to make a journey over into the West country, an' find this heathen god, Wurra-Wurra, an' cast him down even as Patrick cast down Cromm Cruach."

Now the girl lifted her head and spoke up quickly: "But you are not in orders, Keth, an' have no Bishop's

staff to raise against this idol—if so there be one."

"'Tis true I have no Bishop's staff," said he, "nor do I nade wan. I have me handstone. I have me handstone, the same that did for Macc Cairthinn, mind ye, Finola. An' 'tis in me mind that the handstone that spilled the brains of the King's strong man is enough to bash the countenance of a haythin idol."

And he took the stone out of his shield to gaze on its fine shape and feel the weight of it. "'Twas a smaller wan," he said, "a mere stone from the brook with no virtue whativer, that David sunk into the forehead of Goliath."

"Is it the same," whispered Finola with awe in her eyes, "that gave ye the triumph over Macc Cairthinn?"

Keth, Patrick's Strong Man, describing to Finola the virtues of his handstone

"'Tis a better wan," spoke up Keth Mac Maragh proudly. "'Tis of fresh-slaked lime mixed with those same brains of the King's strong man that I spilled with the old wan —mixed with Macc Cairthinn's own brains an' dried in the sun till it has the hardness of flint an' the toughness of oak. Besides—mark this, Finola—'tis a true handstone with all the virtues of me own Red Branch Knighthood. An' who can throw it fairer or swifter than Keth Mac Maragh?"

At these words Finola turned strangely pale. Prisently she threw her arms about the neck of Keth an' besought him not to journey off into that wild West country.

"Keth, darlin'," said she, "'tis the country of the Badb an' all the Dedannan furies, where the terrible Banshees are only the

least of the bad fairies. They will have your body an' your soul." An' then she whispered:

"Stay with Finola. She nades ye, an'—an' soon she'll nade ye sore!"

Now Keth was touched with the tears of Finola, but he was an obstinate man an' his mind was made up to have it for his own great triumph and credit with Patrick, the castin' down of Wurra-Wurra. 'Twas true also that he had become a trifle weary of the white arms of Finola forever draggin' about his neck. So he threw them off gintly, lavin' her there on the

ground half dead with grievin', an' wint straight to Patrick for lave to go on a journey on business of his own.

The good Patrick, bein' easy in his mind an' cheerful now that Cromm Cruach was done for, gave Keth his lave an' a blissin'; an' lest Finola's arms should drag at his neck again, he did not delay, but took his shield an' his handstone an' was off on his long legs for the West country.

Indade, 'twas well he did not loiter, for the old wizard Lochru had already got wind of his interprise an' was brewin' his most divilish spells against him.

Caplait was in the same business. 'Twas a close call for Keth Mac Maragh, for between thim these two howlin' old wizards bossed all the bad fairies an' demons an' reptiles in Ireland.

All this, mind ye, was before Patrick had got ready to attind to the snakes. The land was full of thim. As for fairies, good an' bad, at the time whin the good Patrick landed at Wicklow they were

thicker than the people—which is worth raymimberin', for there were tin times as many Irishmin in Ireland then than iver has been since. In those days 'twas a case of Ireland for the Irish, with the rist of the world lookin' on in envy an' covetousness, but takin' care to kape their hands off to save their heads.

There was no nade for Keth to carry meat or drink—which was another fine thing

about Ireland in those days. At ivery cross-roads was an inn maintained at the public expinse, for the intertainmint of travellers without money an' without price, an' the pot always a-bilin' day an' night. 'Twas the shanachies an' poets who travelled about thicker than thieves, singin' their songs an' tellin' their tales at the courts of the kings, that were the cause of all this hospitality, for

these gentry put on even more airs in those days than they do now, havin' free graft iverywhere, so eager were the people to hear all the news an' the romances.

'Tis already towld how Keth was a bit of a shanachy himsilf, an' well versed in all the wizardry of Patrick's Druid inemies. 'Twas a full grown man's job, by this token, that

old Lochru took on himsilf in layin' his plans to save Wurra-Wurra from the vi'lint hands of Patrick's strong man. An' 'twill iver be to the credit of Lochru's divilish subtlety that he so near finished for poor Keth by transformin' himsilf into a false shanachy an' tacklin' the lad on his soft side.

Through County Armagh an' well into Fermanagh Keth Mac Maragh passed safely, livin' free on the fat of the land an' kapin' an eye opin for signs of the old idol Wurra-Wurra. 'Tis

true that wance Lochru tried to beguile him with a venomous banshee in the guise of a beautiful maiden all smiles an' improper alluremints; but Finola's white shoulder was still so fresh in his mind that he only laughed an' bid her the time of day an' passed on his way.

Wance, too, Lochru sint a swarm of sheevras—which are the most impish of all the bad fairies—with orders to choke Keth to death on salmon bones as he ate his avenin' meal; but 'twas all in vain, for Keth was wise an' kept his fingers crossed.

Havin' seen the failure of these poor experimints, Lochru changed his face out

of all raysimblance to himsilf, an' took a small Irish harp an' wint an' sat on a hillside among the shamrocks close beside the broad road along which he knew Keth was soon to pass. This was his preparation for the grand schame that was to hocus-pocus the idol-hunting strong man for good an' all.

Prisintly, as Keth Mac Maragh hove in sight, all tired and dusty from a hard day of travel, Lochru, in his guise of an old an' decrepit shanachy, twanged the

strings of his harp an' began to sing of past glories whin he was royal shanachy at Tara with four an' twinty pupils all sheddin' lustre on his performance. But whin Keth came abrist of him on the road he lifted his voice in a sort of refrain, the substince of which caused Patrick's strong man to prick up his ears an' pinch himsilf to be sure he was indade awake. For this was the unexpicted purport of Lochru's refrain:

"Hail the dawn of Erin's Golden Age,
Redeemed from Druids' evil signs and spells.
Rejoice at ancient idols overthrown
And demons banished to their flames below.
Cromm Cruach's head doth bow to Patrick's power;
Great Laeghaire takes the Gospel to his heart;
No more shall idols lure the simple mind—
E'en Wurra-Wurra's fatal hour has struck.
Hail Erin's Golden Age,
Hail Patrick and the Blissed Word!"

An' no sooner had the schamin' Lochru in his disguise exprissed these fine Christian sintimints than Keth fell for him. Yis, Keth Mac Maragh fell for him complately—swallowin' bait, hook, line an' all.

Old Lochru, pretindin' not to observe the prisince of the lad, was about to reel off a few more yards of his song, but Keth fell on his neck, sayin':

"Hiven's blessin's rist on ye, old man; for 'tis indade true, as ye've said, that Wurra-Wurra's fatal hour has struck. Tell me where to look for the owld idol that I may bash his face with me hand-stone."

"Do me eyes desayve me?" said the false shanachy, returnin' Keth's embrace. "No; sure 'tis the good Patrick's strong man that

stands before me—Keth Mac Maragh, who, wan day, will be a bishop."

"'Tis the same," said Keth, swellin' with pride at the wizard's prophecy—for that was Keth's great saycrit ambition, to become a bishop. An' now Lochru had him hard an' fast. No suspicion of the false shanachy could have been beaten into his head with an axe.

"But the time passes," said Keth; "show me the road to Wurra-Wurra, that I may speedily earn me bishop's staff."

Lochru was playin' with the lad as a cat plays with a mouse. "Have ye no fear of the druid wizards?" he said. "Can ye circumvint the spells of Lochru? Are ye after thinkin' that Lucat-Moel an' Caplait will let ye come at Wurra-Wurra to do the idol harm?"

"Divil take the wizards an' all their

spells," answered Keth. "Sure, 'tis Keth Mac Maragh, champion strong man an' as good a scholar as the bist of thim, that has all their spells at his finger-ends. So set me on the road to Wurra-Wurra."

"Be it so," said Lochru. "I persayve that ye're already a bishop, savin' the ordination. 'Tis well. Give heed to me words, for 'tis growin' dark an' ye must travil the night through to escape the sure destruction which Lochru has prepared for ye.

"Priss on your prisint way, lad, till ye've rached the top of the third wooded ridge. There ye'll see below ye in the moonlight the glimmerin' surface of a great bog, an' on the farther side of the same an owld round tower to the right, an' Concobar Mac Nessa's ruined castle to the lift. Go straight down to the edge of the bog an' suddenly ye'll see that a fine, hard road leads across it. Cross the bog without fear. 'Tis a short cut to Wurra-Wurra over beyond the round tower, an' 'twill lave ye safe from

Lochru an' all his demon immissaries. Have ye me directions fixed clear in your mind, lad?"

"Yis," said Keth. "An' may the blissin's of Patrick an' all the saints rest on your white head, vinerable owld man, for, thanks to you, Wurra-Wurra is already as good as done for."

The nixt minute Keth's legs were leadin' him straight into the trap so cunningly set for him, an' old Lochru, raysumin' his own face an' form, was chucklin' into his long whiskers.

Now whin Keth came to the top of the third ridge an' looked down upon the great bog, 'twas the darkest hour of the night, whin the bad fairies are up to their worst

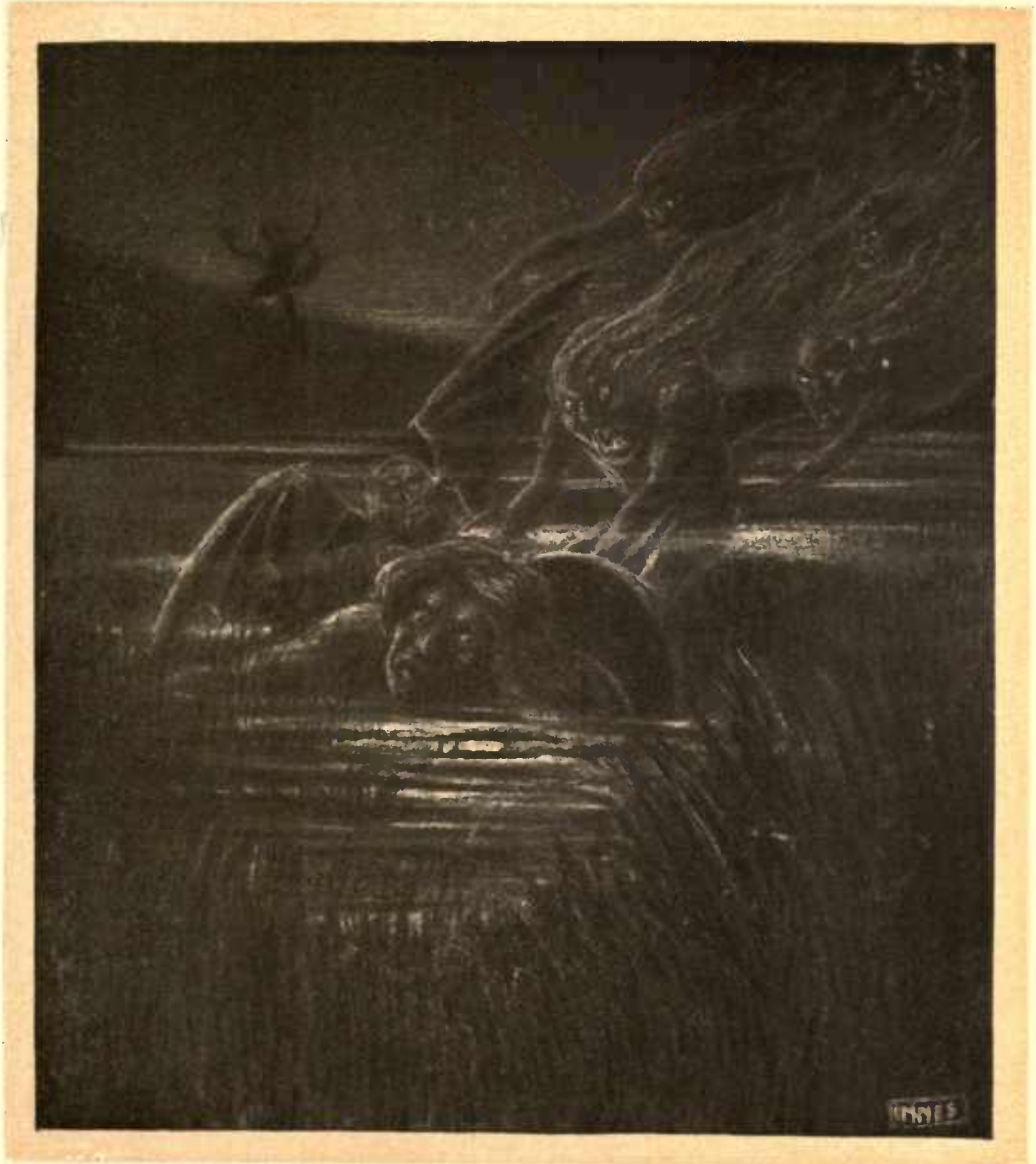
divilmint, an' the dangerous elves an' demons attind to the summons of their masters, the Druid wizards. From the top of the ridge there was no sign of any road across the bog; but Keth, full of foolish faith in the words of the false shanachy, stopped only to draw a full breath, an' was off down the slope at his top speed.

An' sure enough, as he neared the bog's edge, he saw before him a straight, hard road gleamin' in the moonlight an' stretchin' clear an' fair to the hill-slope on the farther side. With a shout of triumph, Keth laped forward an' ran swiftly out upon the road over the bog. An' thin, all at wance, there was no more road, an' he found himsilf flounderin' up to his arm-pits in the quaking mud of the stickiest bog in Ireland.

An' while he floundered he heard a peal of faymiliar, divilish laughter from the bog's edge. There stood old Lochru, holdin' his sides an' waggin' his head—an' thin, in a flash, Keth saw it all, how he had been hocus-pocussed by a false shanachy who was none other than Lochru himsilf.

'Twas useless to waste breath lamintin', or hurlin' hard names at Lochru; Keth saw that he had nade of it all to extricate himsilf from the bog—which he would have done right speedily but for the trump card the old wizard played thin an' there.

All at wance Keth found himsilf surrounded by a swarm of meisi—which are the most dreadful phantoms that inhabit the World of Darkness—summoned by the incantations of Lochru. The sight of thim



Keth Mac Mahugh in the bog, beset by the wizard spells of Lochru

froze Keth's blood in his veins. For a time, so full of terror they filled him, he could naythe speak nor move. Manewhile, ivery minute the bog sucked him down deeper.

Sure it would have been all over with Keth Mac Maragh if, suddenly, there had not appeared before him a vision of Patrick, fearless in his great faith, casting down Cromm Cruach in the very prisince of King Laeghaire an' the most powerful of the Druid wizards. The vision gave him strength to raise his voice to the glory of God an' defiance of the divil, so that he no longer quaked with paralizin' fear of the phantoms, an' was near strugglin' out of the bog.

Thin it was that Lochru summoned Banba, queen of the Dedannan furies, an' with her diabolical aid caused Keth to be

set upon by sheevras, leprechauns an' all manner of demoniac reptiles. All the bog about him was covered with thim, an' all the air murmured and shrieked with the flapping of demon wings. Pookas came and sat upon his shoulders to priss him down into the mire, while the dread Badb, in the guise of a loathsome hag with the wings of a great bat, shut the air from his nostrils and clawed at his throat.

Yet always, at what seemed the fatal momint, the voice of Keth, raised in praise of God an' bowld defiance of the divil, so weakened the demoniac powers that old Lochru, raging in vain, saw the dawn approaching an' his triumph unaccomplished.

Indade, the triumph was Keth's, for, by the blissin' of heaven, he hild out. In fear

of the blastin' rays of the sun, all at wance his demon inemies disappeared with shrieks of baffled vengeance, an' old Lochru with thim. An' soon Keth, still praisin' God an' defyin' the divil, was out of the bog an' dryin' himsilf in the sun.

Whin he was dry an' somewhat risted an' raycuperated after the long agonies of that night, he retraced his steps to the road where Lochru had beguiled him. Wan day an' a night he spint at an inn for food an' slape, while the maids claned the bog slime from his raimint, an' thin proceeded on his way into the West.

Not until he was out of Fermanagh an' well into Roscommon did he come upon any clue to the whereabouts of Wurra-Wurra.

'Twas truly strange that the right direction should come from another shanachy—but a rale wan this time, none other than the great Dubthach Mac na Lugair, royal poet at the court of the King of Connaught.

Keth came upon Dubthach as the renowned shanachy was fastin' on a false poet who owed him a debt for makin' up some rhymes which the false poet recited about the country as his own divine afflatus. This fakir was a failure at bog-drainin' named Fergus, an' havin' neglected to pay for the rhymes he couldn't make up for himself he was shut up in his house while Dubthach sat before his door, neither of thim eatin' nor drinkin', as the custom was, till the matter was settled. Dubthach was so pale an' lean from four days an' nights of fastin'

that his tunic was all in wrinkles about his shoulders. Fergus' plight was worse yet, for as he sat by his open window with his head in his hand he seemed only half alive. Still ivery time Dubthach braced up an' called on him to pay the debt he came back with a sharp answer.

"'Tis four geese an' a sheep ye owe me," said Dubthach, as Keth came up.

"Ye're a liar. 'Tis three geese an' a pig," said Fergus.

"The law is with me, I'll starve the heart out of ye," said Dubthach.

"Yer rhymes were no good, they stuck in me throat," said Fergus. "But I'll pay ye the three geese an' the pig—or see yer bones litterin' me doorstep."

Right here Keth stepped in, havin' great wisdom in such matters. After hearin' both sides he recited to 'em the Brehon law, an' then he said:

"The both of ye are in the wrong. Fergus, what ye owe to Dubthach is not four geese an' a sheep, but four geese an' a pig."

Hearin' this wise judgmint, Dubthach an' Fergus scowled fiercely at each other; but 'twas plain their jaws were achin' to come together on a flitch o' bacon, an' so Dubthach spoke up:

"Niver shall it be told of me," he said, "that I refused to mate an inemy half way. Fergus, ye omadhune, open the door of your hovel an' let out the four geese an' the pig."

Which the same Fergus did, with a string

Keth recites the Brehon Law to Dubthach Mac na Lugair and his debtor

tied to the leg of each of 'em for Dubthach to drive 'em home with. An' Dubthach, with the pig an' the four geese safe in hand, turned an' howled back at Fergus:

"As I'm lavin' your dirty doorstep, ye double-faced falsifier, wan word of advice: Lave off graftin' on your betters an' get back to your bog-drainin'." To Keth Mac Maragh who walked beside him he said:

"Niver mintion it to Fergus, but ye've done me a service this day. Faith, I was that far gone with the fast I could feel me backbone through me stomach! An' now me good frind tell me how I can square the account between the two of us. Will ye take two geese, or the pig?"

Now, bein' well on into the West country, with maybe the great god Wurra-Wurra just

around the turn of the nixt peat bog, Keth felt it was a time to exercise discretion, for the lad was as wise an' cunning as he was strong an' mighty at heavin' the handstone. So he reflected and made this answer to Dubthach:

"Dubthach Mac na Lugair," he said, "the service ye say I've the honor of renderin' ye was no more than would be the duty of any man who knew the law. Ye owe me nothin'. But 'tis in me mind that ye could give me a bit of advice on a private matter, an' let it go no further?"

"On me honor as a royal shanachy," said Dubthach. "Good frind, name your trouble."

"Dubthach," said Keth, with his hand beside his mouth an' his mouth to the poet's ear, "Dubthach, I've a great weight on me mind an' me heart. The heft of it is draggin' me down in the dirt. Night an' day I'm sorrowin' an' grievin' the heart out of me. 'Tis turnin' me hair an' loosenin' me teeth. It turns me food bitter in me mouth an' the best metheglin sour in me throat. I can naythe slape nor stay awake. Unless I find relafe, in another day the wits will be clane gone out of me.

"Iverything I've tried, an' no use at all at all. Sure I've been atin' the cresses an' drinkin' the crazy people's water of Tobernagalt an' Stroove Bran, but divil the bit of forgetfulness of me trouble did it bring me. Wan more day, good Dubthach, an' I'll be a foolish, ravin' loon with all this sore grafe an' worry"—

"Hold, me frind, 'tis enough," broke in Dubthach. "An' ye've struck the right road at last. By nightfall ye'll rache the nixt valley. 'Tis called Glanngalt, mind ye (manin' in the Gaelic the glen of the galts, or loonatics), an' at the bottom of the same ye'll come to the grotto of Wurra-Wurra, our blissed God of Peaceful Souls. Ye've only to make the three prostrations an' whisper your troubles into the blissed ear of

Dubthach, the Royal Shanachy, driving home the price of his poems

Wurra-Wurra an' they'll all fall from ye, lavin' ye clane an' paceful an' in your right mind."

At these words Keth fell on his knees an' kissed the hand of Dubthach that was not busy with the geese an' the pig, showin' the joy an' gratitude he sacretly felt for bein' put on the right track to come up with an' bash the face of this haythin idol Wurra-Wurra. Then he rose an' said:

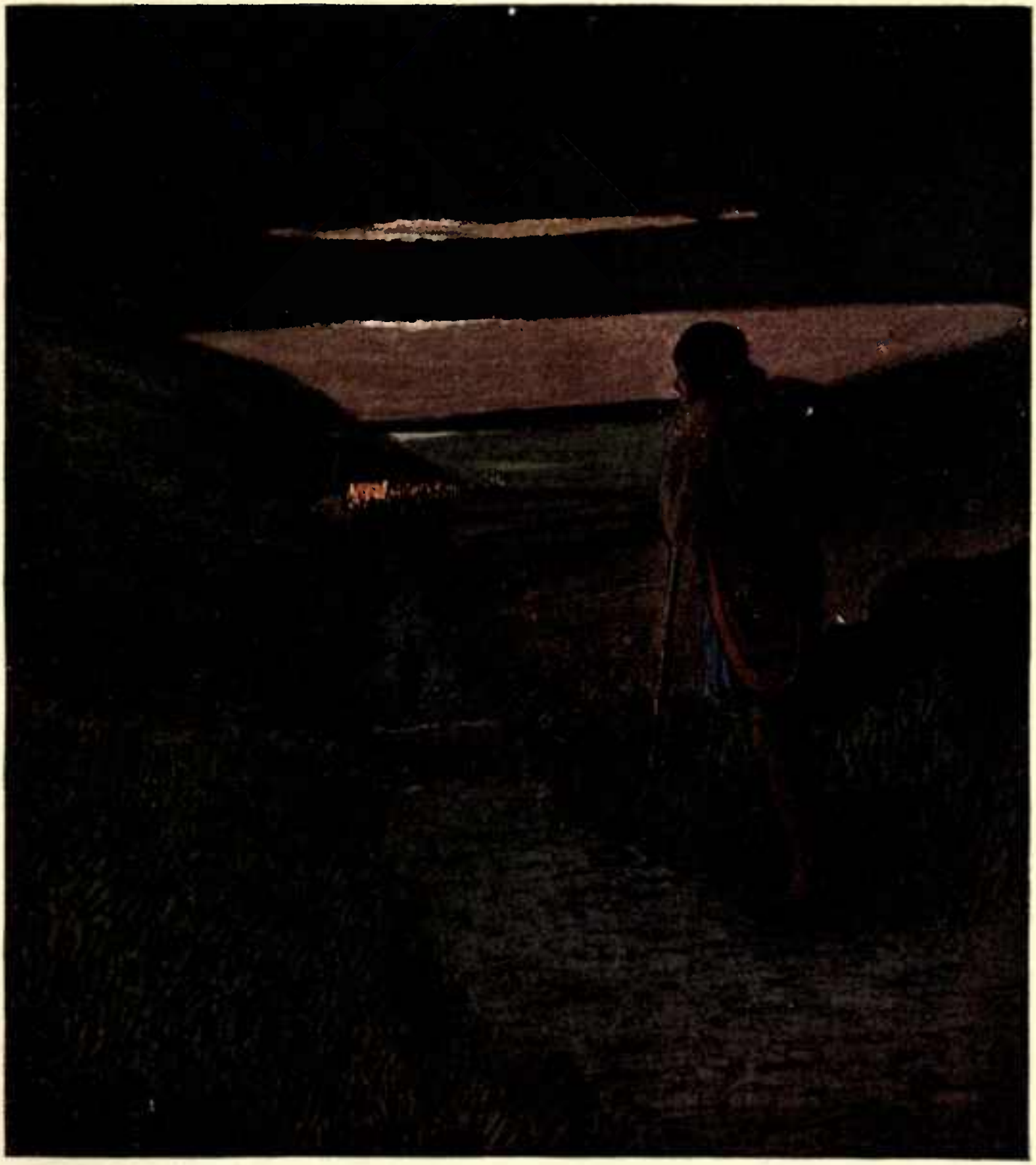
"Wan thing more, good Dubthach. Will ye find me a guide down Glanngalt to the grotto of Wurra-Wurra?"

"Ye'll find a hundred of your own choice," said Dubthach. "Ye've only to enter the valley an' goin' down on wan side ye'll see a string of wild-eyed, sorrowin' loonatics like yersilf—which ye've but to join—an' comin' up on the other side ye'll see another string dancin' an' singin' with joy because of the worries they lift in the grotto behind thim. Stick to the loonatics goin' down, an' on the word of Dubthach ye'll come back dancin' an' singin' with the happy wans."

So now Keth Mac Maragh fell on the neck of Dubthach Mac na Lugair an' embraced him, an' thin wint on his way at so swift a gait that the early avenin' brought him safe into Glanngalt. 'Twas as Dubthach had said: there was the string of sorrowin' min and women goin' down on the wan side an' the happy dancin' people comin' up on the other. An' Keth wint with the loonatics, an' by dark they came to the grotto of Wurra-Wurra that was to be

seen from afar by the light of torches that flamed all about it.

Sure it was a grand sight—barrin' the haythin purpose of it all. The poor loonatics stopped their screechin' from the moment the torches revealed to thim the smilin' face of the idol, which shone from out the arch of the grotto entrance like the moon whin 'tis full at harvest time. An' prisintly the first of the loonatics to prostrate thimsilves at the feet of Wurra-Wurra were passin'



Far down Glanngalt Keth sees the torches flaming about the Grotto of Wurra-Wurra

over to the other side, singin' an' dancin', with niver a fear nor a care to worry thim.

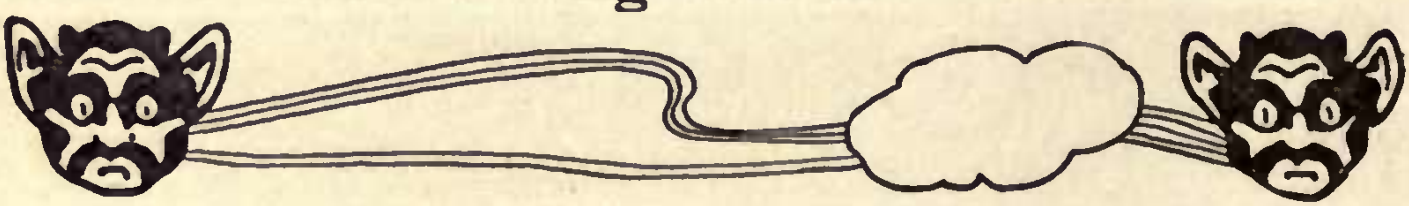
Before dawn 'twas the same with the whole bunch. With the cobwebs brushed clane out of the brains of thim, they were on their way rejoicin', lavin' Keth Mac Maragh alone before the idol, fingerin' his handstone an' wonderin' what manner of spell was on him.

For three times Keth had raised his hand to hurl the stone, and could not. The spirit

was with him, but the flesh was not. The strength had gone out of his arm intirely, an' the fingers that held the handstone had no more grip in thim than the little white wans of Finola.

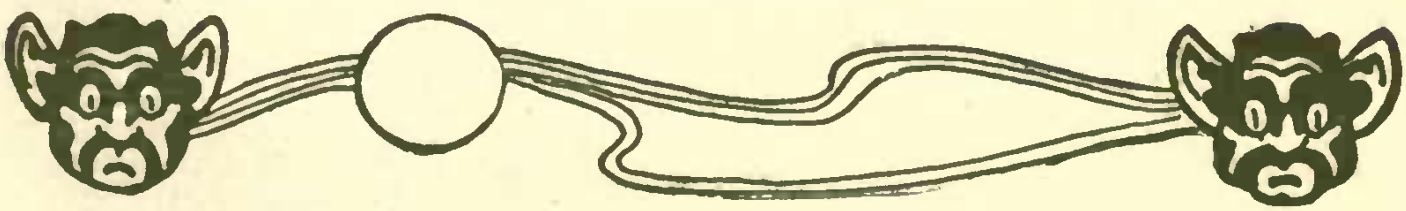
"'Tis Lucat-Moel, or old Lochru, divil take him!" said Keth to himself.

He gazed about in ivery direction, but niver a wizard nor any of their bad fairy hilpers was about the premises. Yet the arm that hild the handstone still hung limp at his side, an' his trimblin' fingers could scarce bear the weight of it.



Now it began to pinetrate the mind of Keth Mac Maragh that while his arm was as heavy as lead, the soul within him was lighter than for many a day. A horrible fear rose within him that the Four Gospils had lost their grip on him, an' it was the same with him as with the rist of the loonatics! With the sweat standin' on his brow, he said a Latin prayer, an' thin muttered to himsilf:

"I will put a curse on the haythin idol. I will curse this Wurra-Wurra as niver haythin idol was cursed before, so that his face



will grow dull with fear an' the strength return to me arm."

An' he turned to curse Wurra-Wurra. 'Twas now, for the first time, he saw the opin ears of the idol that listened day an' night for the gintlist whisper of troubles of man or woman, to take the same on himsilf —an' thin Keth filt the full power of him. The curse died on his lips, all desire of curses wint out of his heart. Keth Mac Maragh, Strong Man to the good Patrick that was to become a blissed saint, leaned upon his shield an' gazed long on the image

that filled the grotto. An' while he gazed the soul of him drank its fill of peace and forgetfulness of care.

For it was true of the ancient Irish God of Peaceful Souls, named Wurra-Wurra, that no creature of woman born could stand before him an' know more of trouble in this world. From ivery shoulder he took off the trouble to place it upon its own, and bear it thinceforth in token of his great love and compassion for all with minds distressed. There was no nade for Keth to read the inscription on the stone which was the idol's

seat—which, indade, he could not, for it was in the most ancient Irish characters. 'Twas Bishop Erc, the same who was Judge in Patrick's household and a very learned man, who afterward put it into Gaelic, which, being translated into English, is the best of all mottoes in the category, namely:

LET WURRA WORRY

There was no nade for Keth Mac Maragh to read this inscription, for the face and figure of the idol, an' his wide opin ears foriver listenin', thimselves told the whole story—not only that it was his business to bear all the worries and troubles of the world, but that he liked the job!

Indade, yis. Though the weight of the world's worries through a hundred cinturies had glued the stomach of him to his thighs,

an' his broad chist risted on his stomach so that the massy shoulders were prissed nearly down to the region of his navel, while the heft of the troubles showered on his head had crunched it down into his bristbone—in spite of all the crushing weight of worries upon him the smile he wore was like the noon sun bursting through after a tin days' rain in April. 'Twas that same smile of Wurra-Wurra that chased away all the curses out of the heart of Keth Mac Maragh an'

brought the great peace to his soul.

Alas! as Keth looked upon the idol, Patrick an' all his glorious works became no more than a faded memory. He filt himself ready to prostrate himsilf before Wurra-Wurra an' whisper into the ear of him his last small worry about Finola of the White Shoulder—upon which he had risted his head more ardently than was good for his ease of mind—whin a well-raymimbered an' hated voice brought him suddenly to himsilf.

"Back, thou sacriligious

monster!" said the voice, an' Keth knew it for the voice of Lochru, the wizard.

Indade, the wizard, prancin' down the hillside into the valley, frothin' at the mouth an' all his whiskers flyin' in the mornin' breeze, was only a lape or two from the mouth of the grotto.

"Back!" he shrieked. "Back! or I'll blast ye with the spell of Banba!"

'Twas nothing against Keth Mac Maragh that in his surprise he should stand back a few paces and raise his shield, for old Lochru in a rage was

a sight to sind children into spasms. 'Twas a good thing, too, for the hated sight of Lochru brought back the grateful mimory of Patrick, an' the strength to his arm, so that he faced the wizard boldly, saying:

"Get thee gone thou Geis of demon's spawn, ere I spill thy rotten brains to gain a new handstone wherewith to destroy thy demon masters! Irk me not, as I have better work at hand than to bandy words with such as thou!"

An', raisin' his handstone while the strength was fresh again in his arm, Keth Mac Maragh hurled it so swift and so straight that the idol's face—barrin' only wan fine ear—was shattered into a thousand pieces. An' Lochru, seeing that Wurra-Wurra was no more—a headless god havin'

With his mighty handstone, defying Lochru, Keth shatters the idol Wurra-Wurra

no further virtue in the Druid philosophy—Lochru ran shriekin' up the valley, to remain until his death the craziest loonatic in Ireland.

"'Tis a fine job well done," raymarked Keth to himsilf as he wint and raycovered his handstone in the grotto from among the fragmints that were wance the head of Wurra-Wurra. "An' now for a bit of sup an' drink, an' a fine long slape."

But 'twas naythe food nor drink nor slape Keth Mac Maragh was to get that day. For he had returned on his way up Glanngalt no more than the distance of nine ridges whin he was stopped by a runner comin' down the valley with the speed of the wind. The boy bein' breathless, Keth was the first to spake:

"If 'tis to the King of Connaught ye bear your message," he said, "sure ye're off your road."

"Keth Mac Maragh," panted the runner—who was lithe an' slender, with round cheeks an' a white chin—"has the day come so soon

Finola runs to Keth and delivers an urgent message from Patrick

whin ye forgit the face of your own Finola?"

"What!" said Keth in astonishment, "will ye tell me that your haythin heresies have so strong a howld on ye that ye've lift the household an' spiritual guidance of the good Patrick of Armagh?"

"Nay," said Finola. "'Tis for Patrick sure I'm runnin', an' the message is to yoursilf."

"So! 'Twas the likes of Finola that gave me away!" And Keth glowered darkly at the maid.

"Tell me, Keth," she said in anxious tones, "ye've not

done it? Ye've not bashed the great idol, Wurra-Wurra?"

Somethin' towld Keth that 'twould be as well for him to dissimble. So he answered cunningly:

"Sure the pot-bellied stone haythin sits as firm on his sate as iver he did."

"O Wurra-Wurra!" said Finola, with hands clasped in gratitude.

"Lave off your heretical supplications," said Keth harshly, "an' hand over me missage from Patrick."

"'Tis this," said Finola, givin' him a

tinder look from her eyes. "Another bunch of poor loonatics have started down Glanngalt to lave their troubles with Wurra-Wurra. Patrick follows with his household, but too late to heal thim with the spirit of the Four Gospils before they feel the spell of the sacred grotto. So ye're to let thim, for this wance, resayve their easemint from Wurra-Wurra, as of old—for sure, Patrick says, the great idol is an instrumint of God, not yet to be destroyed."

"So be it," said Keth, dissimbling again.

"Go you back to Patrick an' I will wait for ye beside the grotto."

Finola flung hersilf upon his neck. "'Tis like the owld swate Keth," she said. "Ah, Keth, why are ye not always true to the gintleness an' hilpfulness that shines in your face so like Wurra-Wurra's own?"

Thin she kissed him and lift him, an' Keth wint slowly back to the grotto, with his chin on his brist, wonderin' how he was to restore the idol's broken head on his

shoulders. He gathered up the pieces an' mixed some clay an' tried to patch thim together, but 'twas no use—too well had the handstone done its work!

An' now Keth could hear the fresh bunch of loonatics comin' shriekin' an' moanin' down the valley. 'Twas even a worse predicamint he was in, for, crowdin' the loonatics on all sides were scores an' hundreds of maids weepin' for their gallivantin' swatehearts, an' old dames lamintin' sheep with the foot rot, cows with calves miscast

an' such like troubles which 'twas in the minds of thim to shoulder off on Wurra-Wurra.

"Sure, 'tis a tight place I'm in," thought Keth Mac Maragh. "The loonatics, an' the maids, an' the old women will be after bashin' the head of me as I bashed their haythin idol. True, I have me handstone, but what is wan handstone for all that crazy bunch?"

An' then suddenly it flashed across his

mind about what Finola had said of his face raysimblin' that of Wurra-Wurra. "Sure, 'tis only the fondness of her foolish little haythin heart," thought Keth. But as 'twas the only chance, an' the first of the loonatics bein' now close to the grotto, Keth Mac Maragh wint behind the headless idol an' leaned over with his neck in the hollow between the shoulders which the handstone had cut as though through a bog-cured cheese. He brought his chin down near to

the idol's navel, prissed the cheek of him against the opin ear that remained so providentially, hid his arms an' body behind the great bulk of the image—an' thin upon the face of him he spread the gintlest and tinderest smile that was in him.

Sure it was all the same to the loonatics. Indade, it seemed an improvement. For, no sooner did a daft wan catch the twinkle in Keth's eye than the twisted brains of him

were all straightened out an' he passed on rejoicin'. As the last of the crazy wans were droppin' their troubles on Wurra-Wurra, Keth saw that Patrick an' his followers had rached the bottom of the valley, where the blissed saint that was to be, surrounded by his bishops and his priests and his psalmists, all in their vestmints, was prachin' the Gospil an' makin' converts of iverybody.

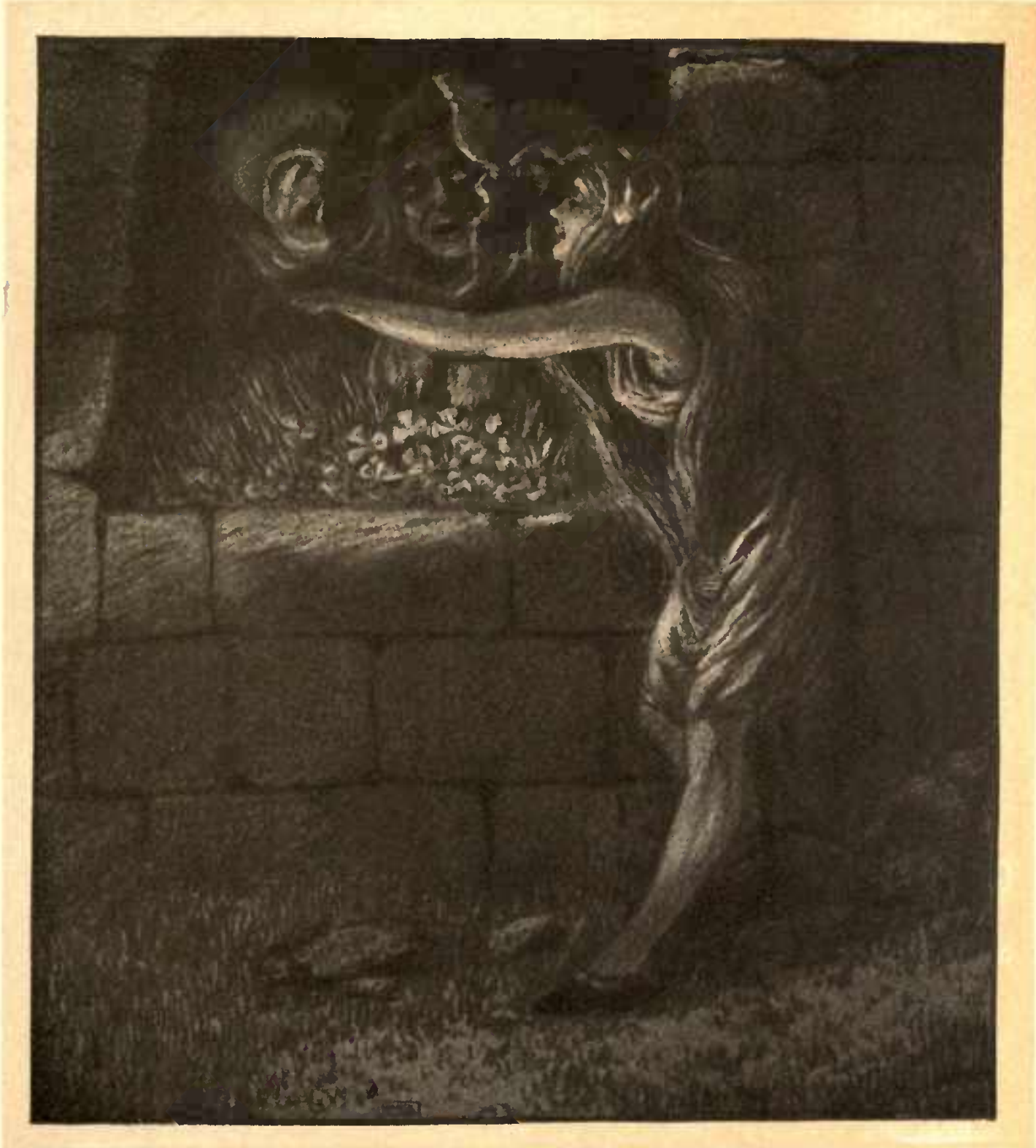
All the while Keth grew bolder with his smile an' the twinkle in his eye. Whin it came to the turn of the old dames with their cow-yard troubles, siveral times he forgot himsilf so far as to smile aloud. Indade, more than wan full-stomached guffaw did he give in the face of thim, an' got away with it, so rayjoiced they were with the lightness of heart that Wurra-Wurra gave thim.

Whin it came to the sorrowin' maids with

their sad tales on their swatehearts, beyond a wink or two at the prettiest Keth was moved to restrain himsilf. For sure, many were the pitiful tales of loving maids' troubles they poured in his ear! Tales they were that made his heart sore, an' disturbed his mind with recollictions of strange words lately dropped by Finola of the White Shoulder. 'Twas this new light on those same words that now caused Keth Mac

Maragh to forget for a momint the smile of Wurra-Wurra, an' to close his eyes with the pain of the thought that came to him.

An' whin Keth opened his eyes the last of the maids was prostrated before him—an' she was Finola! Quickly—though his soul quaked—he raycalled the smile of Wurra-Wurra to his face. 'Twas none too soon, for Finola, risen to her feet an' leanin' over, was pourin' into the idol's ear all the grafe an' dread that clutched her heart.



Keth, in the shattered idol's place, hears Finola's great worry

From Finola's lips the tale was like a white-hot iron in Keth's vitals. Yet it made his heart swell an' rache out to her so that he could not restrain himsilf, but turned his head an' put his lips to hers in a kiss that dropped her like wan dead at the idol's feet.

Now Keth Mac Maragh knew what it was for him to do, an' he rayjoiced to do it quickly. He came out from behind the shattered idol, an' lifted the limp form of Finola in his arms, an' bore her swiftly

through the press of people up to Patrick himsilf, an' said:

"Good Patrick of Armagh, this maid gave her swate silf to me more suns gone by than it pleases me to raymimber. As thy faithful follower, an' for the honor of thy household, I pray you now give her to me in the name of our Holy Church an' in the sight of all min."

An' Patrick, seein' how the matter lay—Finola bein' raycovered from her swoon an' clingin' tight to Keth—

Patrick marries and blesses Keth and Finola of the White Shoulder

thin an' there married an' blissed thim.

'Tis towld in the books how Keth became a bishop, though niver would he altogether lay aside the handstone which had lain low the last idol in Ireland, an' how all the four fine sons that Finola bore him were sure death to snakes an' Druid wizards till not wan of ayther was lift in the land.

Concernin' the grotto, an' the headless idol in it, all there prisint bein' now con-

vertid Christians, by their own free will they prisintly destroyed ivery vistige of both. Yet to this day there remains on the lips of all the Irish race in time of trouble or worry that same ancient invocation: "O Wurra-Wurra!"

An' the ixplanation is Patrick's own desire that it should be so. For, as he raymarked upon that occasion, Wurra-Wurra, as spoken in the Gaelic, is the same as wan calling upon the blissid Virgin, "O Mary!" in that tongue.

FINIS.

WURRA-WURRA

From a Photograph of the original wax model of the reconstructed Idol.

"Ye've only to whisper your worries into the blissed ear of Wurra-Wurra an' they'll all fall from ye, lavin' ye clane an' paceful an' in your right mind."—*Legend of Wurra-Wurra.*

HISTORICAL NOTES

HISTORICAL NOTES ON THE LEGEND

BANBA (p. 39): "Banba, the queen of one of the three Dedannan princes, who ruled the land, sent a swarm of meisa, or phantoms, which froze the blood of the invaders (the Milesians) with terror."—*Joyce's Social History of Ancient Ireland.*

BOG-CURED CHEESE (p. 72): "Masses of cheese have been found in bogs, of which some specimens may be seen in the National Museum."—*Joyce's Social History.*

BOOK OF THE DUN COW (p. 14): "One of the most ancient collections of Irish historical and legendary material, curiously named for the color of the cow in whose tanned skin it was bound."—*Joyce.*

BREHON LAW (p. 44): "A judge was called a Brehon. . . . The Brehons had absolutely in their hands the

interpretation of the laws and the application of them to individual cases."—*Joyce.*

CROMM CRUACH (p. 11): "Cromm Cruach, covered with gold and silver, and twelve other idols covered with brass about him."—*Tripartite Life of St. Patrick.*

"And the earth swallowed up the twelve other images as far as their heads, and they stand thus in token of the miracle."—*Book of Armagh.*

DEDANNAN FURIES (p. 22): "A mythical race of powerful, demoniac and dangerous elves."—*Joyce.*

DEMONS, WIZARDS, DRUIDS (p. 24): All the ancient accounts agree that while the Druids were the only educators in the Ireland of their time, they were also magicians and wizards, and could command the services of demons and fairies, good and bad.—*Tr.*

"The demons used to show themselves unto their worshippers in visible forms: they often attacked the people, and they were seen flying in the air and

walking on the earth, loathsome and horrible to behold."—*Joyce.*

"God protect me from the spells of women (Druidesses) and Smiths, and Druids."—*St. Patrick's Hymn.*

DUBTHACH MAC NA LUGAIR (p. 42): Here the Legend does not quite agree with the authorities. Instead of being attached to the court of the King of Connaught, he was royal poet and shanachy at Tara during the greater part of Laeghaire's reign as Over-King of Ireland.—*Tr.*

ETHNE THE FAIR, AND FEDELM THE RUDDY (p. 9): In the "Tripartite Life of St. Patrick" and in the "Book of Armagh," these two daughters of King Laeghaire are mentioned as being under the instruction of the Druid priests, Caplait and Lucat-Moel, at the time when Patrick overthrew Cromm Cruach and the twelve smaller idols and made Christian converts of the entire royal family.—*Tr.*

FINOLA OF THE WHITE SHOULDER (p. 16): A heroine of the "Book of Armagh." Evidently the Legend mistakes her for Cruimthiris, mentioned in the "Tripartite Life" as one of the three embroideresses in Patrick's household.

(P. 79): The reference to the four sons of Finola of the White Shoulder is clearly legendary.—*Tr.*

FASTING TO COLLECT A DEBT (p. 42): "The plaintiff, having served due notice, went to the house of the defendant, and, sitting before the door, remained there without food; and as long as he remained, the defendant was also obliged to fast."—*Joyce.*

GEIS (p. 62): "A geis was something forbidden. It was believed to be very dangerous to disregard these prohibitions."—*Joyce.*

GLANNGALT (p. 48): "There is a valley in Kerry called Glanngalt, the glen of the galts, or lunatics." —*Joyce.*

Here the Legend, by locating Glanngalt in Roscommon, is palpably in error.—*Tr.*

HANDSTONE (p. 20): "It was the custom at that time, every champion they killed in single combat, to take the brains out of their heads and mix lime with them till they were formed into hard balls."—*Book of Leinster.*

INNS (p. 26): The hospitable custom of maintaining inns for the free entertainment of travellers is mentioned by nearly all authorities regarding the social life of the ancient Irish. A most interesting account is contained in "Joyce's Social History."—*Tr.*

LAEGHAIRE (p. 9): Modern form, Leary; he was the Irish Over-King when Patrick landed at Wicklow and began his missionary labors in Ireland, A.D. 432. All the characters in the Legend are historic, and the names are spelled as originally derived from the Gaelic.—*Tr.*

MAC MARAGH, KETH (p. 14): Evidently confused with Keth Magach, a famous warrior and champion of that time, whose exploits are narrated in the "Book of Armagh."—*Tr.*

MACC CAIRTHINN (p. 20): In the "Tripartite Life" Macc Cairthinn is named as Patrick's Strong Man. Evidently the Legend confuses him with Keth Magach.

(P. 21): According to the "Tripartite Life," it was Patrick's Strong Man, Macc Cairthinn, who became a bishop, not Keth Magach.—*Tr.*

METHEGLIN (p. 47): Also called mead, "was made chiefly from honey: it was a drink in much request, and was considered a delicacy. . . . It was slightly intoxicating."—*Joyce.*

POPULATION (p. 25): "For the people were very numerous in Ireland at that time, and so great were their numbers that the land could afford but thrice nine ridges to each man in Erin: viz., nine of bog, nine of field and nine of wood."—*Book of Hymns (Todd).*

PRESBITER BESCNA (p. 13): Named, with all the members of Patrick's household, in the "Tripartite Life."—*Tr.*

RED BRANCH KNIGHTS (p. 20): According to Joyce and other authorities, this was an order created by Concobar Mac Nessa, a very ancient king of Ulster, and whose greatest commander was Cuculainn, the mightiest hero of Irish romance.—*Tr.*

SHANACHY (p. 26): "The people . . . took delight in listening to poetry, history and romantic stories, recited by professional poets and shanachies."—*Joyce.*

STANDARDS OF VALUE (p. 44): As in many other countries in ancient times, a cow, or an ox, was the standard of value. It seems probable, therefore, that the Legend is correct in using sheep, pigs and geese for the "fractional currency" of the period.—*Tr.*

STRONG MAN (p. 14): These Strong Men, or champions, like the smiths and other metal-workers, appear frequently in the old annals as distinguished also for their knowledge of law and history, and for their story-telling ability.—*Tr.*

TARA (p. 10): Seat of the Irish Over-Kings. Old Erin's centre of government, of learning and of chivalry. Then, as now, the most eloquent of all words descriptive of Ireland's ancient glory. In poetry, imperishable in the line: "The harp that once thro' Tara's halls." The scene of St. Patrick's first efforts to redeem Ireland from paganism.—*Tr.*

TOBERNAGALT (p. 48): "Drinking of the water of Tobernagalt (the lunatics' well), and eating of the cresses that grew along the little stream, the poor wanderers get restored to sanity. . . . There is a well called Stroove Bran, which was thought to possess the same virtue as Tobernagalt."—*Joyce.*

WURRA-WURRA (p. 18): The authorities do not specifically mention the existence of an idol having that name; but they agree that idols were worshipped in all parts of ancient Ireland.—*Tr.*

The Irish up to that time (St. Patrick's) "had worshipped only idols and abominations."—*St. Patrick's Confession.*

"The destruction of idols in various parts of the country was an important part of St. Patrick's life-work."—*Joyce.*

(P. 80): Some Gaelic scholars hold that the familiar exclamation, "Wurra-wurra!" is the nearest approach in that tongue to the conventional invocation of the Blessed Virgin. The Legend, however, makes it, in that sense, an adaptation—evidently intending a tribute to St. Patrick's well-known policy of harmonizing his teachings, as far as possible at the start, with ancient customs and beliefs.—*Tr.*

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